

*John Collier*

AT THE SCENT OF WATER  
WORDS SPOKEN BY THE RIGHT REVEREND  
ABBOT GASQUET O.S.B. AT THE FIRST CEN-  
TENARY OF SAINT ALOYSIUS'S CHURCH  
SOMERSTOWN ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1908

THE INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES  
10 ELMSLEY PLACE  
TORONTO 5, CANADA

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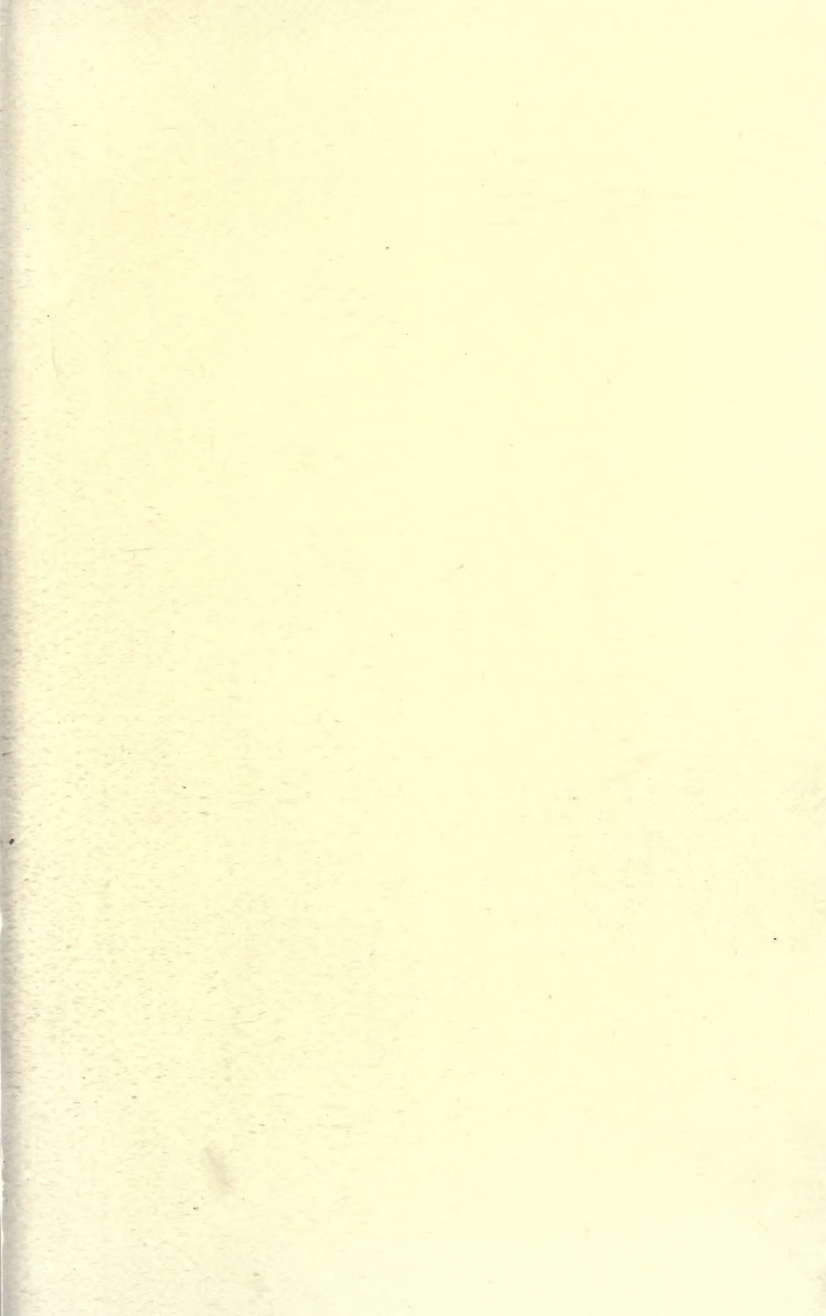




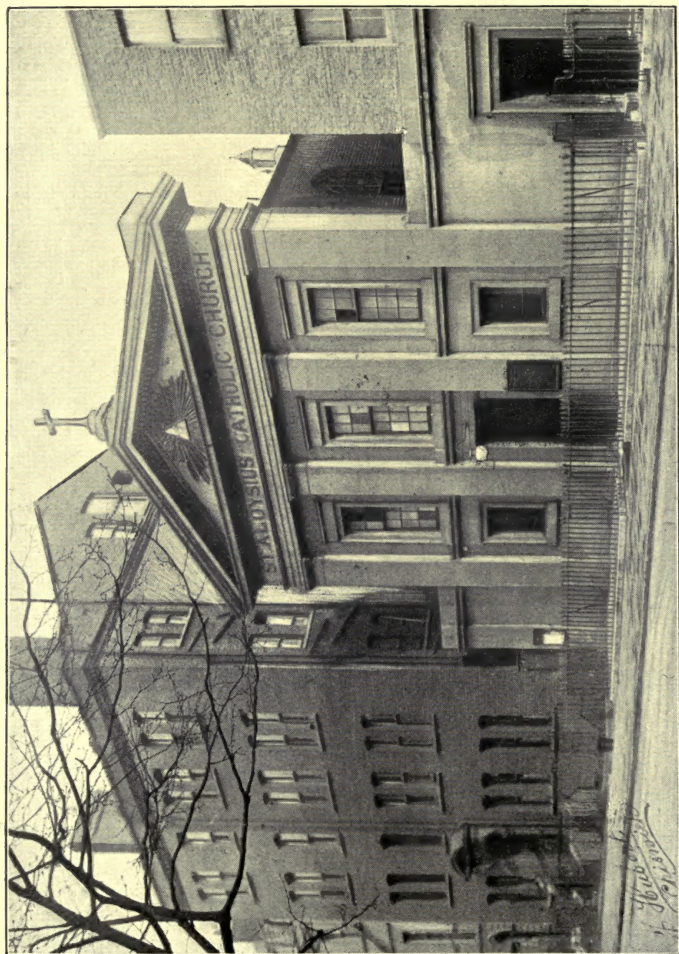
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13.  
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THE publication of the following historical Prefatory  
retrospect, which was preached by the note  
Right Rev. Abbot Gasquet, O.S.B., D.D., in  
the Church of St Aloysius, Somers Town,  
N.W., on the occasion of the hundredth anni-  
versary of its opening in 1808, will be wel-  
comed as an interesting addition to the history  
of the revival of the Catholic religion in Eng-  
land, after the previous two centuries and a  
half of oppression, cruel disabilities and penal  
enactments.

The mind is carried back to the remarkable  
influx of French emigrant priests, who were  
forced to leave their own country on account  
of the Revolution, and who in return for the  
hospitality given them in England devoted  
their lives to the service of religion and edu-  
cation in this country. The Church of St  
Aloysius, which, for those days, both in style  
of architecture and in size, represented the  
summit of Catholic ambition, still stands as a  
monument to their zeal and devotion. In the  
neighbourhood of three great lines of railways,  
and in one of the poorest localities, as a link  
with the past, this Church, curious and quaint  
as it is, remains one of the most interesting  
Churches in London.

The gratitude of the Catholics of England  
and of London in particular should ever go  
forth to the saintly priests who, under the

At the scent of water Providence of God, were sent to us by the Revolution in France, and, among other things, it is hoped that the publication of the following powerful review may serve to elicit the sympathy and the help of London Catholics for the future progress of the Somers Town Mission.

THE RECTOR.

CHRISTMAS, 1908.



*A tree hath hope: if it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout. If its root be old in the earth, and its stock be dead in the dust, at the scent of water it shall spring, and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted.—Job xiv.*

THESE words of the book of Job seem to me appropriate to the celebration we are keeping. A centenary is no common event. The centenary of any place is no ordinary occasion for it carries the mind back over the span of more than three generations and suggests comparison of the present with the past. It reminds us of many incidents in the story of a century of life which it is a pleasure and which it is useful to recall. The centenary of a church, to every Catholic, is, and must be, something more. For a hundred years the sanctuary has been the centre of Christian life; the place where Our Blessed Lord has dwelt in the midst of His people, as truly as when He lived at Nazareth or, in the days of His ministry, walked the roads of Galilee or the streets of Jerusalem. For a hundred years He has dispensed from the place dedicated to Him the abundance of His graces through the channels of His sacraments. For a hundred years in His house, at the foot of the Tabernacle, the weary have found in Him their

At the scent rest, the weak have obtained from Him  
of water their strength, the sorrowful have been  
consoled by Him, and the penitent has been  
assured of mercy and forgiveness. To a  
Catholic, whose faith is a real factor of his  
life, every church is peculiarly the House of  
God—the place where His glory dwelleth.  
With Jesus ever present under the sacra-  
mental veils in the Most Holy Sacrament, the  
church is a special place of contact between  
God and this world of ours, since upon the  
altar is offered up, day by day, in the Holy  
Sacrifice of the Mass, the Lamb that was once  
slain on Calvary for the sins of mankind.

A HUNDRED years ago, this church in A hundred  
which we are now gathered, was dedi- years ago  
cated to God's service. A hundred years  
ago! How different was the position of Catho-  
lics then to what it is now, and, in more senses  
than one, this lowly building is a precious—a  
sacred monument of the revival of Catholic  
life in this country. This event, then, natur-  
ally suggests a retrospect of the past; but to  
understand all that has been done since the  
foundations of this church were laid, it is  
necessary to go back even beyond the be-  
ginning of the century that is past.

At the present day, when for more than  
two generations we Catholics have been  
accustomed to enjoy religious liberty—in  
view of late events in regard to the Euchar-  
istic Congress I cannot say *full* religious  
liberty—it is difficult for us to realize what is  
meant by Catholic "Emancipation." Many,  
and perhaps indeed most of us, hardly under-  
stand the actual position of English and Irish  
Catholics in regard to the State, say, at the  
dawn of the nineteenth century—hardly  
more than a hundred years ago. Some will  
hardly believe that at that time our Catholic  
forefathers were still suffering under rem-  
nants of the penal code which had, in the  
course of the previous two centuries and a  
half, pressed heavily upon them, and which,



At the scent but for God's manifest Providence, would  
of water have crushed out the last flickering flame of  
Catholic life, as these cruel disabilities and  
penal enactments had been designed to do,  
and as had actually been done in Norway  
and Sweden. From the First Act of Uniform-  
ity, passed in the early years of the reign of  
Elizabeth, to the last decades of the eigh-  
teenth century—that is for two hundred and  
twenty or thirty years—every effort was  
made to stamp out the Catholic religion in  
England. I need not go into this matter  
further than to say that by the beginning of  
the eighteenth century active persecution,  
exclusion from every form of civil life, and per-  
petual fines for not attending the Protestant  
service in parish churches, had done their  
work; and the remnant of those who had  
never bowed their knees to Baal were few and  
insignificant in numbers and influence, and  
were rigidly ostracized by the Protestant  
majority amongst whom they lived. Hope  
seemed to be departing, even if it had not  
already gone: and in the darkest hour which  
preceded better times, the thoughts and  
feelings of many a Catholic heart were but  
little removed, except by resignation to  
God's will, from blank despair. It is impossi-  
ble in this to exaggerate: ingenious repressive  
measures had taken the place of active

persecution, but even so at best the Catholic found himself an alien in his own country. The Statute Book still recorded laws against his property, his liberty and his life, and though these were seldom called into action against him, they were always held in terror over him and at times, up to the close of the eighteenth century, were through spite or religious bigotry sometimes invoked to crush individuals. Mr Lecky, the Protestant historian of the eighteenth century, characterises the laws—the penal laws to which Catholics were still subject—as “atrocious,” and it was not till 1778 that the first measure of relief was accorded to the Catholic body. A hundred years ago

This Act for the removal of the gross injustice inflicted upon Catholics led, as all know, to the anti-Catholic agitation which culminated in the Gordon riots of 1780. It is in the attitude of Catholics—or most of them—at this time, that, as it seems to me, we have revealed to us in the most striking manner the pitiable state to which long endured persecution had reduced them. They were afraid of courting observation: they thought their only security was obscurity; they feared that the laws still in existence would be invoked to lash them back to their holes and hiding places, and they besought the bolder spirits amongst

At the scent of water them, who urged continued agitation, to be quiet and not to court attention. They even endeavoured to promote a petition to the Crown praying for the abolition of the small measure of relief that had been granted to them under Sir George Savile's Act of 1778. Such was the state of mind in which the anti-popish riots of 1780 left the Catholics of three kingdoms. "I know well," said the great O'Connell of the Catholic gentry—"I know well how difficult their position has hitherto been; how constantly against them the efforts of the persecutor have been directed; how for three centuries, indeed, they have borne the whole weight of oppression which crushed down their fellow-countrymen even to the dust. The blood of their noblest members rendered its own red testimony upon the scaffold, in devoted vindication of that faith which the first missionaries to these shores had preached to their ancestors. Others survived, but it was only to endure a lingering martyrdom never to cease but with the natural duration of life itself. More happy far were those whose martyrdom was consummated upon the scaffold; for them at least their sufferings were ended and they entered at once into their reward in bliss. But their less fortunate survivors saw themselves doomed, without



reprieve, to lives of suffering, contumely and A hundred  
ignominy of every kind at the hands of the years ago  
basest and most ignoble of their Protestant  
countrymen. And they stood it nobly."

Catholics in  
1780

AT the close of the eighteenth century, when the story of this place in which we are gathered to-night really begins, the position of the Catholic body in England, though improved, was still truly deplorable. The very relaxations of penal enactments seem to have resulted in serious defections among the remaining upper classes, and profound discouragement is almost the only note which can be discovered in the writings of this period. In 1780 the number of Catholics in England was calculated to be only between 60,000 and 70,000, at a time when the population of the country was estimated at 6,000,000. In other words Catholics were then probably hardly more than one per cent. of the English people. According to Joseph Berington—a writer of that period, and one who took every pains to discover the truth—in whole districts not a single Catholic was remaining. After London, the greatest number was to be found in Lancashire, and some of the bigger cities such as Manchester, Wolverhampton and Newcastle. But outside the cities, with the single exception of Lancashire, the remnant of the Catholic body which had survived the active persecutions of two centuries and the ostracism of the last generation was to be found in the neighbourhood of the houses of

the families who had remained staunch to the faith of their fathers. All during the eighteenth century, according to the same authority, Catholics had rapidly decreased, and in 1780 the shrinkage was still going on. In one district, he tells us, eight out of thirteen missionary centres had ceased to exist within the past decade, and in another, many places, where there had been a resident priest, were vacant, and there was no immediate hope of obtaining another priest to fill any of those derelict cures. Catholics in 1780

As regards the number of clergy at this period, the most careful estimate made at the time places them for the entire country at only three hundred and sixty. In 1781, the Midland district, which comprised all the Midland counties, had fourteen missionary centres vacant; and the total number of Catholics for that district is given as 8,460, hardly more than two-thirds of what it was thirty years before. The London district at this time, besides London on both sides of the Thames, extended over nine counties in the South of England, and it had only fifty-eight priests to serve for all purposes, whilst here, too, there were five vacant places for which no priest could be found. The Catholics are reported to be dying out in all parts save in the metropolis; and indeed in



At the scent of water the metropolis itself, what we know of the Catholics about this time is that they were considered almost a negligible quantity, amid the ever-growing population. Maitland, in his *History of London*, written in 1772, amongst other chapels in the city sets forth what he calls the "Popish places of worship." They are seven in number, and all save one are the private chapels of the Embassies from various Catholic nations of Europe, to which Catholics were allowed access. These were the French Embassy, Greek Street, Soho; the Imperial (*i.e.*, Austrian) Embassy, Hanover Square; the Portuguese Embassy, Golden Square; the Sardinian Embassy, Lincoln's Inn Fields; the Spanish Embassy, Ormond Street; and the Venetian Embassy, Suffolk Street. The seventh, Maitland calls "The Popish Meeting House" in Bullers Alley, Grub Street.

CARDINAL NEWMAN has left us a description of the position of Catholicism at the beginning of the last century, as he knew it, when still outside the Church in the early years of his life. The whole passage is so graphic and so much to the point, that I cannot forbear quoting it at length.

"The presence of Catholicism," he says, "was at length simply removed, its grace disowned, its power despised, its name, except as a matter of history, at length almost unknown. It took a long time to do this thoroughly; much time, much thought, much labour, much expense, but at last the work was done. Truth was disposed of and shovelled away, and there was a calm, a silence, a sort of peace—and such was about the state of things when we were born into this weary world (at the beginning of the nineteenth century).

"*You* have seen it on one side and some of us on another; but one and all of us can bear witness to the fact of the utter contempt into which Catholicism had fallen by the time we were born. You (who have always been Catholics) know it, alas! far better than I can know it, but it may not be out of place if, by one or two tokens, as by the stroke of a pencil, I bear witness to you from without of what you can witness so much

At the scent more truly from within. No longer the  
of water Catholic Church in the country—nay, no  
longer I may say a Catholic community, but  
a few adherents of the old religion, moving  
silently and sorrowfully about as memorials  
of what had been. The ‘Roman Catholics’—  
not a sect, not even an interest, as men con-  
ceived of it; not a body, however small,  
representative of the great communion  
abroad, but a mere handful of individuals,  
who might be counted like the pebbles and  
*detritus* of the great deluge, and who, for-  
sooth, merely happened to retain a creed  
which, in its day, indeed, was the profession  
of a Church. Here, a set of poor Irishmen  
coming and going at harvest-time, or a  
colony of them lodged in a miserable quarter  
of the vast metropolis. There, perhaps, an  
elderly person was seen walking in the streets,  
grave and solitary and strange, though noble  
in bearing and said to be of good family, and  
a ‘Roman Catholic.’ An old-fashioned house  
of gloomy appearance, closed in with high  
walls, with an iron gate and yews, and the  
report attaching to it that ‘Roman Catholics’  
lived there; but who they were, and what  
they did, or what was meant by calling them  
‘Roman Catholics,’ no one could tell, though  
it had an unpleasant sound, and told of form  
and superstition. And then, perhaps, as we

went to and fro, looking with a boy's curious eyes through the great city, we might come to-day upon some Moravian chapel, or Quakers' meeting-house, and to-morrow on a chapel of the 'Roman Catholics,' but nothing was to be gathered from it except that there were lights burning there, and some boys in white swinging censers.

"Such were the Catholics of England, found in corners and alleys and cellars and the housetops, or in the recesses of the country, cut off from the populous world around them. . . . At length so feeble did they become, so utterly contemptible, that contempt gave birth to pity, and the more generous of their tyrants actually began to wish to bestow on them some favour, under the notion that their opinions were simply too absurd ever to spread again, and that they themselves, were they but raised in civil importance, would soon unlearn and be ashamed of them. And thus, out of mere kindness to us, they began to vilify our doctrines to the Protestant world, that so our very idiocy, or our secret unbelief, might be our plea for mercy."


Such was the position of the Catholic body in this land when this church of St Aloysius, Somers Town, was raised a century ago. "The tree hath hope," though "its



At the scent stock" seemed to "be dead in the dust."  
of water "Cut down" even to the ground "it  
groweth green again, and the boughs thereof  
sprout," because "its roots be old in the earth,"  
and at the scent of water it springs into life  
and "brings forth leaves, as when it was first  
planted." All this is an accomplished fact  
to-day; and as we look round about us and  
give God thanks for the bud and bloom and  
fruit, the new life and vigour and energy to  
which no one can shut his eyes, we ask our-  
selves, How has all this, under God's Provi-  
dence, come to pass? What was "the scent  
of water," which brought the sap once again  
into the old stock, which seemed to be dead in  
the dust, and made it to live once more?

**I**N some measure, at least, and I think it must be confessed in great measure, in the marvellous designs of God Almighty, it was the great French Revolution, which swept away religion and order in France, that was destined to be the greatest blessing to the Catholic religion in this country. This great cataclysm came, in the first place, as an object-lesson to English statesmen and made them realize that the Catholic Church in reality made for law and order and was opposed by its very constitution to the spirit of revolution which seemed to have gained a sure foothold in Europe generally. During the Pontificates of Benedict XIV and his three immediate successors, the influence of the Catholic clergy had been uniformly exercised in support of authority and, as Mr Lecky, the Protestant historian, points out, nearly all political insurrections of that era had been in countries professing Protestant principles. For this reason Edmund Burke used the power of his eloquence in favour of the Catholic cause, and pointing to the attitude of the French Revolutionary party towards the Church, said: "If the Catholic religion is destroyed by the infidels, it is a most contemptible and absurd idea that this (English Church) or any other Protestant Church can long survive the event."

The émigré  
priests

At the scent of water  But beyond anything else it was the Christian charity displayed by the English as a nation towards the bishops and clergy exiled from France, and the genuine hospitality accorded to them, that effected a change, and a lasting change, in the sentiments of the people at large towards the Catholic religion. The presence of a vast number of French *émigré* priests in England did much to familiarize men with Catholics and Catholic clergy and to teach them that many of the stories which, through prejudice or ignorance, they had been taught to believe about us and our religion, were obviously untrue in fact. In September and October, 1792, more than 6,000 French bishops and clergy had been received into England, and that number was shortly increased to over 8,000, whilst at the same time more than 3,000 priests and ecclesiastics had found a temporary refuge in the Island of Jersey. Besides the money furnished for their support by the English Government, collections were made in almost every Protestant parish church of this land for these *émigré* priests. At one time some 660 of these French priests were lodged at Winchester in the Royal Palace; and in my own early days I recall the fact that my father, who had himself come over from the South of France in

those troublous times, used to describe the way in which these priests at Winchester were wont to chaunt their office together in the land of their exile, and how their voices could be heard as a mighty wave of sound all over the city. He used further to tell us that the hearts of the French Catholic *émigrés* were deeply touched by the abundant charity of the English nation, and that they felt convinced that God would not fail to bless the people of this land with the riches of His grace for all that they had done for the French exiles in the days of their trouble.

The émigré  
priests



The Abbé Carron **I**HAVE said that in 1792 upwards of 3,000 priests from France had found a refuge in Jersey. Amongst these was one whose name must be on our lips and in our hearts to-day: that is, of course, the Abbé Carron. Guy Jules Carron was a brave Breton, born at Rennes on February 23, 1760. He was a man of indomitable energy, exceptional talent, and extraordinary piety. Before the outbreak of the Revolution he had already made a name for himself as a writer of spiritual books of acknowledged excellence, as an organizer of charitable works, and as possessing a burning love of souls. He set himself at once to oppose the irreligious and atheistical forces of the Revolution with the result that in the middle of 1792 he found himself in prison for his religious opinions and under a sentence of exile from France. He arrived in Jersey in September, 1792, in the company of two hundred and fifty priests, his fellow exiles, and found already at St Heliers and elsewhere in the island over three thousand other priests and religious, who had escaped from the atrocities being committed in their country under the sacred name of liberty. He had expected to find amongst them a friend of long standing—Jean François de la Marche—the Bishop of Saint Pol de Léon, whose monumental

tablet erected by Abbé Carron still stands in yonder corner. He found, however, that the Bishop was in London, and so he quickly made his way thither to concert with his friend some measures to help the French exiles. The memory, however, of the many needs of the *émigrés* in Jersey so occupied his mind that he quickly returned to that island and threw himself with characteristic energy into the work of organizing schools for the French children, and libraries for both clergy and laity. So successful was he that when, two years later, he left Jersey, he received the thanks both of the authorities of the island and of the British Government for the good he had effected during his stay. It was not, however, for human praise that he laboured. It was duty that ever called him to work, with the single-minded purpose of serving God. It was said of him at the time, that he seemed to live always in the presence of God, and to derive all his strength from the thought that God everywhere saw him and read the secret desires of his heart to ever serve Him more and more. During long hours in the night he was seen to kneel in silent prayer, and always, when his difficulties were greatest, he sought their removal by going to visit Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. His zeal and single-minded pur-

The Abbé  
Carron

At the scent of water means pose was so obvious that Protestants of came forward to support him in his works of charity.

In 1795 a French army gathered under General Hoche on the coasts of Brittany with the avowed intention of making a descent upon the island of Jersey; and the English Government, fearing the possibility of the exiles falling into the hands of the Revolutionary forces, obliged them to cross over into England. Abbé Carron arrived in London some time in the September of 1796, and at once began to dream of some institutions after the model of those which had proved so successful in Jersey.

HE found his friend the Bishop of Saint Pol de Léon established in the house of a pious English Catholic lady whose name deserves to be remembered. This was Mrs Silburn, who turned her home in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, into a refuge for French priests. Here the Bishop of Léon set up a central office to afford assistance to the French emigrants, and to this place all alms were sent for distribution. I may perhaps here note that Mrs Silburn, after distributing all she had in the multitude of her charity, died at Morlaix in Brittany in 1820. The *Journal Ecclésiastique* in recording her death calls her "the New Tabitha" or Dorcas, and declares that her memory will ever be held in benediction by French ecclesiastics for her charity to them, in the days of their exile.

The Abbé  
Carron in  
London

After consultation with his friend the Bishop, Abbé Carron's first endeavour was to establish in London schools for the instruction of the children of the *émigrés*, and finding that they had congregated in this neighbourhood, then a country suburb of the great city, he took two houses in Tottenham Place, Tottenham Court Road, and set up there two schools under the direction of competent French gentlemen and ladies. The reason for the choice of this neighbourhood is



At the scent of water not far to seek. The pleasant country village of Somers Town a short time before had been invaded by the builder with the result that, as so frequently happens on the outskirts of great cities, the building was overdone, and many houses, after remaining long in carcasses, were sold for less than their materials had cost. This attracted the poverty of the French exiles, and the houses were quickly completed and occupied by the French colony. Abbé Carron, on his arrival in London, was absolutely without means of any sort, but experience had taught him that Providence helped those who, working for God, relied upon His assistance with entire confidence; neither were his hopes disappointed in all the years of his ministry in this neighbourhood which followed. To the Bishop of the London district, Dr Douglas, the schemes of the energetic French priest appeared rash and dangerous, and on the occasion of a visit made to the new schools in company with the Bishop of Léon, Abbé Carron's devoted friend, the cautious Bishop Douglas ventured to express his astonishment and alarm. "Oh!" replied the Bishop of Léon, "this is nothing. I am quite used to see the Abbé work miracles!"

In 1798 the Abbé Carron opened his first humble chapel for the French *émigrés* at "6

Garden Gate, corner of Brill Place, Skinner Street, Somers Town," and this, 110 years ago, was the beginning of this Catholic parish. He soon afterwards removed his boarding school for youths from Tottenham Place to No. 3 Phoenix Street, and that for young ladies to No. 1. At this time in these establishments he had eighty boys and sixty girls, and as most of them were the children of *émigrés*, who were in great poverty, he received very little from his pupils, and had to gather the necessary support from others. Here, and in other matters, he gratefully acknowledged the generosity of non-Catholics, and indeed it would have been impossible for him to continue and extend his charities as he did, but for the help of Protestants. In the years that he was in London it is calculated that this true apostle collected and expended on his various works considerably more than £100,000.

On the removal of his schools in 1799 to Phoenix Place, Abbé Carron turned his houses in Tottenham Place into a home for infirm and aged *émigré* priests. This was a great need, for all round this neighbourhood there were gathered numbers of priests who could obviously find no employment of a sacerdotal character, and who had to gain a precarious living as teachers of music, drawing,

The Abbé  
Carron in  
London

At the scent of water or modern languages. I can myself remember being shown hard by here the little house where one of the last of these priests had lived, who had gained a slight addition to the pension of thirty-five shillings a month, nobly allowed to these men by the British Government, by raising in his little garden and making French salads for the tables of the rich. Many of these men were too old to help themselves, and so into the two houses above named Abbé Carron collected some forty of his brethren, whom he cared for with all the love of his great heart, till they were laid to rest in the old cemetery of St Pancras. In this hospice those that were able met morning and evening to say their Breviary together; and each morning and evening before they separated they joined in prayer that, for the Christian charity shown to them in this Protestant land, God in His mercy would bless the King, the Royal Family, and the people of Great Britain.

At this time—the year 1799—the Abbé Carron, not contented with what he was doing in this suburb of London, assisted and encouraged the establishment of other French centres in various parts. In 1800 there were no less than eight French chapels set down in the *Catholic Directory*, and the authorities allowed Mass and Instruction

every Sunday in the French ward in Middlesex Hospital. Three years later, however, this number was reduced to the French Chapel in Conway Street, Fitzroy Square; No. 6 Garden Gate; and Little George Street, Portman Square. The Abbé Carron in London

At the beginning of the nineteenth century and probably in the first part of it, the indefatigable Abbé established a home for French ladies, and before he finished his work he had some seven establishments depending upon him, and occupying ten houses of which the English Government in its appreciation of his work paid the rent of three. The seven establishments were: the two schools for French boys and girls; the Hospice for sick French ladies; the Hospice for French ecclesiastics; a Catholic free school for boys and another for girls; and lastly, what he called the "Chambre de la Providence"—an association of English and French ladies to visit the sick in their houses and to instruct those who needed it.



The build-  
ing of the  
church

**I**N 1807, Abbé Carron determined to build a proper church, on lines which most people considered rash and improvident for the times in which they were living. It was completed at a cost of £4,000, and dedicated to God's service in 1808. We may see it to-day practically as the founder of this mission saw it at the opening day a hundred years ago. In the *Directory* of 1809—the year after the dedication—we see that there was at Somers Town High Mass every Sunday, with a discourse in English and French alternately. At 3 o'clock there was Catechism in French followed by Vespers at 4 with Benediction. At 6.30 there was Catechism in English, again followed by Benediction, which was also given on the afternoon of Wednesdays. This mention of Benediction is not without interest. Abbé Carron, as we know, was all his life imbued with a deep devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and in view of the late great Eucharistic Congress in London it is of interest to point out that it was many years—probably twenty—before any other church in London followed the example of Somers Town, and published the fact that Benediction was given to the faithful three times in the week.

The church was opened with some amount of debt upon it, and to pay this off, and to

support the gratuitous schools, which had hitherto been maintained by the friends of Abbé Carron, an appeal was made in 1809. This year also a change was made in regard to the status of the mission now fully established, which is not without interest. Hitherto Somers Town had been placed under the general heading of French chapels, but on the completion of the new church Abbé Carron desired that it should take its place as one of the Catholic churches of the English nation, and for this purpose he handed over the whole property to the Bishop, so that he should have no difficulty in dealing with it at any time or hesitate to appoint any priest, French or English, as he thought good.

In 1813, a Protestant writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* thus speaks of the Abbé Carron's work here: "Clarendon Square, which includes the Polygon, contains on the south side the extensive establishments of the Abbé Carron, a gentleman who does his native country honour. He resides in the house, late Mr Lertoux's (the builder of Somers Town), and he presides over four schools—for young ladies, poor girls, young gentlemen and poor boys. A dormitory, bakehouse, etc., are situated between his house and the emigrant chapel

At the scent recently built and licensed . . . which contains the body of the late Princess of Condé.  
of water Farther on is the school for the poor girls, and at the back of the whole are convenient buildings for the above purposes and a large garden. The general voice of the place is in the Abbé's favour; and he has been of incalculable service to his distressed fellow-sufferers, who are enthusiastic in his praise."

**A**MIDST all his work, charitable and literary, the Abbé Carron found time to continue his literary labours, and the publication of several more volumes of ascetical works attested at once his industry and high spirituality, besides being a boon to many souls seeking to walk in the higher paths of perfection. Besides this, in the abundance of his zeal, directly or indirectly, he assisted in the establishment of other missionary centres in London; and Hampstead, Chelsea and Kensington at least can point to French influence for their first beginnings. Moreover, the reputation of the Abbé Carron for solid piety brought many people, both English and French, to Somers Town to seek advice. Thus it is probable that the great Chateaubriand came here for that purpose to Clarendon Square to seek his friend the Abbé. Hither, too, came the young de Lamennais, when in doubt of his vocation, and it is more than probable that it was within these walls within which we are now gathered, that this erratic and gifted man of genius determined to become a priest. Alas! that the generous emotions stirred up in his heart by the apostolic zeal and by the humility of the Abbé Carron failed in the end to preserve him from the pride which led to his defection from the Church.



The Abbé's literary labours

**I**N 1814, the Abbé Carron removed his higher French boys' school to 55 and 56 Clarendon Square, and the girls' establishment to No. 59. But in this year the connection of the Abbé with England came to an end. He had long been urged to return to France and work for the restoration of religion in his native country. King Louis XVIII himself urged the zealous priest to come to Paris and transfer the two French schools he had founded in Somers Town to the capital of his native country. Abbé Carron was undecided and left the decision to Bishop Poynter, who had now succeeded Bishop Douglas as Vicar-Apostolic of the London district. The Bishop decided that it was Abbé Carron's duty to obey the call of his sovereign, and so in 1814 he departed from this place he had founded and which he loved so well. He went away, if possible, in greater poverty than he had come eighteen years before. Though he had gathered and spent on others thousands upon thousands of pounds, he had reserved nothing for himself, and to defray the cost of the journey of his housekeeper to France it was necessary to make an appeal to his friends in Somers Town. The letter he wrote to his people in saying his adieu shows the depth of his feelings at this time and the genuine

affection he had for what he calls "my large colony of Little France of Somers Town." The pain of his departure was somewhat soothed because he left behind him, to carry on his work, a man after his own heart, and one whom he described as "a saintly, apostolic and able priest." This was Father Jean Nerinckx, a native of French Flanders, and an *émigré*. He had assisted Abbé Carron almost from the first at Somers Town and remained to carry on the Abbé's good works for many years. In fact, as an aged priest, retired from work and living in a little house almost within the precincts of the convent, it was my privilege to know this venerable and venerated servant of God. His memorial tablet stands yonder by the sacristy door, and Cardinal Wiseman thus records his high opinion of his virtues in a letter addressed to my father, who, as a lifelong friend and as his physician, had stood by the bedside of this saintly priest in his last hours. "I thank you sincerely for your kind reference to the death of our worthy friend, Mr Nerinckx. If he has gone to spend his Christmas happily in heaven, as his blameless life and many virtues give us every reason to hope, his departure has certainly cast a gloom over the celebration of this holy festival to many. I sincerely and deeply regret his loss, and I

The Abbé's  
literary  
labours

At the scent shall too often be reminded of it, in connection with charitable and other good deeds."

Abbé Carron himself had died in 1821, and his sorrowing friends in England placed a monument to his memory in this church, which is itself the best record of his work here. You may see his likeness still standing upon it, although his name and the inscription recording his works are no longer legible. It stands by the side of yonder main door of this church.

IT is impossible, and indeed unnecessary, for me to trace the history of this mission and church after the days of its pious founder. I cannot, however, refrain from recalling the memory of a remarkable and saintly woman, Mother Margaret Hallahan, whose early life was spent in the orphanage founded by Abbé Carron, whilst it was directed by him. She remembered him well, and from childhood she was impressed by his unbounded faith and confidence in God. It was a life lesson for her in the Dominican foundations she was called upon to make. When any unusual difficulties weighed upon him, she used to say, the pious priest was wont "to draw down dew from heaven," as he expressed it, by giving away in alms what little money he had remaining, and Providence never failed him. Here too she first learnt that abiding sense of the Divine presence which she never afterwards lost. She was accustomed to trace this habitual sense to the effect of what we who have known Somers Town long ago remember so well—a representation of the ever-watchful eye of God, which was painted in a triangle over the high altar in this church. To Mother Margaret's childish imagination it appeared to be the veritable eye of God, as it seemed to follow her wherever she turned.

Mother  
Margaret  
Hallahan



A contrast

AND now for a brief moment contrast the present with the past of a century ago. When the Abbé Carron first came to this neighbourhood in 1796, Somers Town was but a country village on the outskirts of this great city of London. In the century that has elapsed the ever-growing wave of population has passed over it, and the outskirts are now miles further afield. The changes wrought by the seeming law of great cities, which compels the inhabitants to ever be moving westward, has changed the character of the surroundings, whilst the establishment and growth of the great railway systems in this district have swept away the people from vast areas which were fully occupied.

When Abbé Carron first set up this church, the whole city of London with its suburbs was served by twelve mission chapels, in which some five-and-twenty priests ministered to the spiritual needs of the Catholic population. Even as late as 1814, the year that Abbé Carron left Somers Town to return to France, Dr Poynter, the Bishop, gives the number of priests as thirty-one, and the Catholic population as 49,800. But the erection of Somers Town may be taken as the proclamation of the beginning of a new life. The tree was "growing green again, and

the boughs were sprouting." Somers Town, A contrast in 1808, was the proclamation that the "tree had hope," and that, though its stock would seem to be dead in the dust, "the scent of water" had reached it, and it was springing into life and "bringing forth leaves as when it was first planted" by Augustine and his monks in the soil of England.

Has not the promise been fulfilled? Look round about to-day. The dozen churches which served London on both sides of the Thames in 1808 have become more than 200, and the twenty-five priests are to-day hardly less than 800. Some, too, of our churches are of a character which proclaims the faith of those who had raised them as shrines of the altar of the Christian sacrifice, and as the dwelling places of our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament. St George's Cathedral over the water, Spanish Place, the Oratory, Our Lady of Victories, and the Carmelites, with others in the West, with Highgate and Haverstock Hill in the North, and, above all, the vast and nobly proportioned Cathedral at Westminster, these are but a few of those monuments of zeal and generosity set up during the past century. How all this, and a hundred times more than this, has been done, in spite of our poverty as a body, we need not inquire, in view of the

At the scent of water trust which the venerable founder of this mission had in the Providence of Almighty God. To Him alone be glory and praise. And to-day, when we have gone back in spirit to the beginnings of this revival—this second spring as Cardinal Newman called it—when we are gathered together in a building which truly may be considered as the first harbinger of the new life—to-day, if ever, our hearts should warm with gratitude to the great God, who has wrought all these things in our own day, and has given us to see His greatness and power. May His name be blessed for ever and ever.











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